

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 31, 2006

**April is National Minority Health Month**

**COLUMBIA** - April is being observed as National Minority Health Month across the nation and in South Carolina by proclamation from Governor Mark Sanford, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control reported today.

"The goals of the observance include raising and expanding awareness about health disparities in minority communities and to implement strategies to address these disparities," said Gardenia Ruff, director of DHECs Office of Minority Health. "In South Carolina, racial and ethnic minorities experience higher rates of a variety of health concerns than other populations."

DHEC statistics indicate that in South Carolina, minorities are more than twice as likely to die from a stroke as whites and are also more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes. African-American males in the state are more than three times as likely to die of prostate cancer as white males and African-American females are nearly twice as likely to die from breast cancer as their white counterparts.

"There are many underlying causes and reasons for health disparities which range from unhealthy lifestyles such as poor nutrition, smoking, lack of physical activity, and other risky behaviors to unequal access to medical care and unequal health care treatment," Ruff said. "What are needed are effective strategies, at the individual, community, health care and policy levels that address the unique cultural needs of the minority population. This is crucial in preventing disease, promoting health and delivering appropriate care supported by policies and programs."

Ruff said South Carolinians are finding creative ways to address these problems at the community level. Some of the activities include:

A health fair to be held in Columbia April 8. Contact Dorthea Lewis (803) 733-5450  
A diabetes symposium in Orangeburg April 11. Contact Sabina Hannibal (803) 395-4072  
A Hispanic health fair in Greer April 15. Contact Ilia Rivera (864) 567-3641

As part of the observance, DHECs Office of Minority Health developed a calendar of health disparity events and initiatives, which can be seen on DHECs web site at [www.scdhec.gov/omh](http://www.scdhec.gov/omh). For information on National Minority Health Month, go to [www.nmhm.org](http://www.nmhm.org).

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For more information:

Briana Harper - (803) 898-3814

Thom Berry - (803) 898-4461

E-mail: [berrytw@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:berrytw@dhec.sc.gov)

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